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Purification of the Sacred Bundles, a Ceremony of the Pawnee

BY

RALPH LINTON

Assistant Curator of North American Ethnology

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PURIFICATION OF THE SACRED BUNDLES, PAWNEE.
MINIATURE GROUP IN CASE 50, HALL 6.

[facing p. 1(41)]

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Purification of the Sacred Bundles, a Ceremony of the Pawnee

The religious beliefs of the Pawnee, which seem, in some ways, to have been on a higher plane than those of the other Plains tribes, have been described in Leaflet 5 of this series, under the title "The Thunder Ceremony of the Pawnee." At the head of their pantheon stood Tirawa, a purely spiritual being, who was not identified with any animal, object, or natural phenomenon. Below him there were a great number of gods of lesser rank who were divided into two great classes,—the gods of the heavens and the gods of the earth. The former were, for the most part, identified with the stars, the Evening Star holding the highest place, with the Morning Star second. The former was an embodiment of all the female, the latter of all the male, attributes. The gods of the earth were, for the most part, identified with animals, and their rank was less rigidly fixed. Of the two groups the heavenly gods were the more important, and were considered the guardians of the people as a whole, while the earthly gods were more especially the guardians of individuals and secret societies.

The ceremonies held in honor of the heavenly gods centered around collections of sacred objects called by the whites sacred bundles or medicine bundles. The Skidi Pawnee called them *chuhraraperu*, meaning

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"rains-wrapped-up." The tribe was divided into a number of villages all of whose members traced their descent in the female line from a single ancestor. Each of these villages possessed a sacred bundle, while there were two others which were considered the property of the tribe as a whole. The Four Direction village had four sacred bundles one of which was sacred to each of the cardinal points: These points were, to the Pawnee, southwest, southeast, northwest, and northeast. The sacred bundle of each village was believed to have been given to its first ancestor by one of the heavenly beings, and constituted a link between its members and the divine donor. From their traditions the "gift" seems to have consisted rather in explicit directions for its making than in an actual presentation of the objects. The bundles were inherited in the female line so that their owners were always women. Their keepers, and the priests who performed their ceremonies, were, on the other hand, men.

All the village bundles contained much the same objects. The most important of these were one or two ears of corn, which were called Mother-Corn and were believed to give life to the bundle. They were shelled in the spring and distributed for seed, being replaced at harvest time. When the Mother-Corn consisted of two ears, one of these was attached to a stick and symbolized the male element or Morning Star, while the other symbolized the female element or Evening Star. Next in importance to the Mother-Corn were the tobacco-filled skins of hawks and owls. The hawk symbolized a warrior; the owl, a chief, because it was always awake and watchful. The owl seems to have also symbolized the watchfulness of Tirawa, the supreme being. One or more scalps, taken from slain enemies, were found in every bundle. Pieces cut from them were used in various ceremonies, and they had to be renewed from time to time. Four skins, each of

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which contained red, black, and white paint in little buckskin pouches; sweet grass, a pipe and native tobacco, and the penis bone of a racoon, were also placed in each bundle, all these objects being used in the ceremonies. The sweet grass was burned as incense, and the bone was attached to a stick and used as a fork to remove meat from the pot. Some bundles contained additional objects. 778

When the bundle was not in use, all these articles were done up in an inner and an outer wrapper of buffalo hide and tied with a rope of plaited buffalo-hair. To the outside of the bundle were attached the stems of one or more pipes whose bowls were in the bundle, a few arrows captured from the enemy, and some other objects. The arrows were used as fire pokers and pipe tampers during the ceremonies. In ceremonial smoking it was forbidden to press down the tobacco in the pipe with the finger lest the gods should think that the smoker offered himself to them with the tobacco. Associated with each bundle, and often fastened to it, there were four large gourd rattles of special form. These symbolized the four dieties who were the special guardians of the Evening Star, and also represented the breasts of the two divine women in the west,—the Evening Star and the Moon. [276 782]

Except at the time of ceremonies, the sacred bundle was hung up on the west side of its keeper's lodge, above the buffalo skull which was always placed there. When so hung, it was likened by the Pawnee to a dead man in his grave. The spirit lived in it, but slept. Even when opened, the bundle continued asleep until the Mother-Corn had been placed in it. It then came to life, and during the ceremony the corn and the other objects represented, individually and collectively, supernatural beings. These beliefs of the Pawnee differ considerably from those held by most of the other tribes who used sacred bundles; and Dr. G. A. Dorsey [171]

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171 has concluded that the village bundles of the Pawnee
778 are more nearly comparable to the elaborate altars of the Southwestern Indians than to the medicine bundles of the northern Plains tribes and Central Algonkins.

778 It seems probable that there was originally a special
796 ceremony connected with each bundle. There were additional ceremonies, such as that held when the first thunder was heard in the spring, which might be performed with several bundles in turn, and there were a few rites in which all the bundles participated. The
[783] purification of the sacred bundles belonged to the last class.

778 The purification ceremony was held in the spring
783 and again in the autumn, before the tribe left their permanent villages for the buffalo hunt. It has already been said that the Four Direction village had four sacred bundles. These took the lead in successive years. When the chiefs had decided upon the date for departure on the hunt, they notified the priest of the bundle which was leader in that year. He sent his errand man to summon the priests of the other three bundles. These came to his lodge, bringing their bundles with them. As they entered, they beat their bundles, then crossed to the west side of the lodge, and seated themselves with their bundles in front of them on the ground. The errand man was then sent to summon the keepers of all the other village bundles, directing them to bring their bundles and also mats, pillows, and food-bowls. When these arrived at the lodge, they took designated places around it, spreading their mats on the ground and hanging their bundles, unopened, on the wall behind them.

783 When all had arrived, one of the four priests went through the village announcing the beginning of the ceremony and calling on the people to bring gifts to
[782] Mother-Corn. These gifts consisted of a robe, moccasins, a hair cord, to be used as a girdle, and dried meat

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and fat. The articles of clothing had to be new and unused, and the meat that of buffalo which had been dedicated to the gods at the time they were killed. The gifts could only be presented by men who were in favor with the gods. If the priests accepted them from men who were evil in their lives or negligent in their religious duties, the gods would be offended and refuse to send the buffalo. Before taking a gift to the lodge, a man painted himself red, so that all the people might know his errand; and, when the gift had been accepted, two messengers went through the village, thanking him publicly.

The priests and bundle keepers remained in the lodge for three days and nights, sleeping in their designated places. No ceremonies seem to have been performed during this period, and they passed the time in talk and in feasting on the food which was brought to them. No women were allowed to enter the lodge during the whole time of the ceremony.

On the morning of the fourth day the priests of the Four Direction bundles rose very early and dug a rectangular pit to the west of the fire-place, between it and the permanent altar of the lodge. The buffalo skull, which at ordinary times stood on this altar, was removed and placed north of the fire-place. The earth from the excavation was taken outside the lodge and piled in a mound before the door. When the pit was finished, the priests carpeted it with white downy feathers. This pit seems to have corresponded to the pit dug below the scaffold at the time of the human sacrifice to the Morning Star and, like it, represented the Evening Star's garden in the west, the source of all earthly fertility and increase.

When the pit had been completed, the priests directed the keepers of the various bundles to open them and take out the Mother-Corn. A sacred stick, kept in the Big-Black-Meteoric-Star bundle, was set up

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778 just east of the pit. The keeper of that bundle then
783 brought the Mother-Corn from it and placed it in the pit, thrusting the stick to which the male ear was attached into the earth so that it stood upright and leaning the other ear against its base. The keepers of the other bundles then came forward in turn and did the same. A wooden bowl filled with water was then placed to the east of the pit, between it and the fire-place. A clam shell was laid in the bowl, and a turtle, supported by a framework of sticks, was placed
[825] upon it. To the northeast and northwest of the bowl were laid the heads and necks of loons, to the southeast the head and neck of a swan, and to the southwest a gar fish. The meaning of these objects is not perfectly understood. The bowl seems to have represented earth and water; the turtle, fire and also one of the important earthly gods. The loons and swan represented earthly gods, guardians of medicine men; and the gar fish, the great sea monster which first gave the medicine men's ceremony to human beings.

After these objects had been arranged, the chief priest selected four men to sit at the northeast, northwest, southeast and southwest corners of the bowl. The sacred stick from the Big-Black-Meteoric-Star bundle, and a star chart, kept in a bag attached to that bundle, were taken outside and placed on the mound in front of the doorway. The priest then took four smooth stones from the same bundle and gave one to each of the four men. These stones were extremely sacred, and were believed to have been given to the people at the beginning of the world. They were pro-
[482] vided with withe handles so that they could be carried without touching them. When they had been distributed, the priest said, "It is now time for these men to go outside and look at the heavens and over the earth. They will take with them these four stones, which were given to our people when the earth was

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created." Turning to the men, he told them to rise and go out of the lodge. When they had risen, he went to the man who stood on the northeast and gave him the sacred pipe from the bundle which was the leader in that year and a strip of dried buffalo fat about one foot long and four inches wide. After this the men passed out of the lodge, while the priests sang a song describing their looking at the heavens and earth. 778 783

The four men seated themselves around the mound of earth taken from the pit in the same positions they had occupied around the bowl in the lodge. An errand man then kindled a small fire to the east of the mound, and the man who sat on the northeast placed the dried fat upon it. As soon as the grease began to run out, the other three men caught some of it in their hands and greased their hands and faces. They also greased the sacred stones and passed them through the smoke. When this had been done, the fat was removed from the fire, and all four smoked the sacred pipe, passing it from one to another. At the conclusion of the smoking, the pipe was laid on the mound, and all stood up slowly, looking at the sky in all directions. They then picked up the fat, the pipe, and the sacred stones, and re-entered the lodge.

While the men were outside, the priests had sung a series of songs, but ceased singing as they entered. The man from the northeast, who was the leader of the four, went to the bowl of water, picked up the bird's head which lay northeast of the bowl, dipped its bill in the water, and drank from it. He then pressed it first to his right and then to his left breast, and replaced it on the ground. He took up the turtle and did the same with it, except that he pressed it against his abdomen instead of his breast. When he had finished, he stood a short distance away on the west, and the other three men came from their respective directions and went through the same performance. After this [533]

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783 rite, they seated themselves in their original places,
778 and the priest said, "Priests, the men whom we have sent out to look about have returned. They will tell us what they have seen." The man on the northeast rose and announced, "We went out before daylight. We found the buffalo; so many of them that they have almost drunk the river dry." The others rose in turn and gave the same answer.

The chief priest then called some famous warrior and gave him the sacred pipe which the men had used, and gave the strip of fat to a chief. These passed around the interior of the lodge, first on the north, and then on the south side, offering first the pipe and then the fat to each of the keepers in turn. All reached for the pipe at once, trying to get as many hands on it as possible. They did the same with the fat, clutching it as if starving and trying to tear off pieces. This sym-
[777] bolized their eagerness to kill buffalo, and the tighter a man grasped the pipe, and the more fat he succeeded in tearing off, the better would be his success on the hunt.

When the pipe and fat had completed their circuit, they were placed on the altar. The priest then called the chief of the whole band to the altar and invested him with the robe, rope, and moccasins which had been provided as gifts to Mother-Corn. The sacred pipe was placed in his hands, and the priest announced, "Priests and men, this man will take us to the river." All the keepers then went to the pit and took from it the Mother-Corn belonging to their respective bundles.

While this was going on, men had entered the lodge and seated themselves in front of the bundles belonging to their respective villages. The star chart was brought in from outside and given to a warrior belonging to the village of the Big-Black-Meteoric-Star bundle. Three other men were given quivers belonging to other sacred bundles. These four seated themselves,

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one behind the other, near the entrance of the lodge, the man with the star chart being in the lead. The various objects in the bundles were then distributed to the men from their villages. The chief of the band, in his ceremonial costume, left the lodge, and began to muster the small boys of the tribe outside. All who were old enough to take part were expected to be present, and in performing this duty the chief was supposed to show his watchfulness over the people. 778 783

During the distribution of the sacred objects the priests had been shaking their rattles and singing. Three songs were sung, and when they reached a certain word in the fourth, the man who carried the star chart jumped up and ran toward the river, closely followed by the men with the quivers. All the others followed them, with much crowding and fighting at the doorway. The priests and the keepers of the bundles remained behind. The men raced to the river bank, and there lined up in four ranks. Anyone who overtook the runner with the star chart snatched it from him, the idea being to carry it to the stream in the least possible time. At the river bank it was returned to its original bearer. The man with the star chart, and those with the quivers, stood in the center of the front rank, with the men who carried the Mother-Corn on either side. Behind them stood the men with the owl and hawk skins from the bundles, and behind these in turn the bearers of the less important objects. The last rank was made up of small boys, who carried racoon bones and arrows. When all had taken their places, the ranks opened in the center, and the chief came through, carrying the sacred pipe. He waded down into the water and went through the motions of bathing the pipe four times, although he did not wet it. He then pretended to wash first his right and then his left hand, and finally dipped his right hand in the water and touched it to his mouth, [533]

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778 nose, and forehead, and then drew it down his face.
783 These movements were repeated four times, with the right and left hands alternately. When he had done this, he came up out of the water, passed through the ranks, and took his place behind the rearmost, with his face toward the village. The men of the first rank then waded down into the stream and went through the same performance with the sacred objects they carried. They then passed through the other ranks and took their place behind the chief. The other two ranks did the same. When all had finished, the chief led them back to the village. As they entered it, the small boys dispersed, but the men continued on to the ceremonial lodge, where they returned the objects they carried to the keepers of the bundles and put on their robes, which they had left behind during the race. They then returned to their own lodges.

All the women who were bundle owners had ground corn during the preceding night and made mush.
[262] This mush had been brought to the lodge and given to the chief priest early in the morning, before the commencement of the ceremonies just described. He now offered a little of it to the gods and distributed the rest to the priests and keepers. They ate, and then tied their sacred bundles, took up their mats, pillows, and bowls, and returned to their own lodges.

783 After they had left the ceremonial lodge, a crier went through the town, telling the people to clean their lodges and the streets of their villages and carry the filth away. When this had been done, the priests who had taken part in the ceremony had a sweat lodge built, and one of them stood outside it, shaking his gourd rattle and singing. All the people assembled and ran a race down to the river. When they reached
[515] it, the priests waded in, came out at once, and went to the sweat lodge, where they took a steam bath. The

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rest of the village, men, women and children, remained at the river, swimming and playing in the water.

Ceremonies of general purification were important among the settled agricultural tribes of the southeastern and southwestern United States. Among these tribes they were usually associated with the making of new fire, a feature which seems to have been lacking in the Pawnee ceremony. The account of this ceremony has been compiled from the unpublished notes of Dr. G. A. Dorsey.

RALPH LINTON